

Classic Poetry Series

Amir Khusro

- 18 poems -

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Amir Khusro (1253 - 1325)

Ab'ul Hasan Yamin al-Din Khusrow (Persian: / Urdu اَبُو حَسَن یٰمِنُ الدِّینِ کُھسْرُو; Hindi: अमिर ख़ुसरो देहलीवाली), better known as Amir Khusrow (or Khusrau) Dehlawi was an Indian musician, scholar and poet. He was an iconic figure in the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent. A Sufi mystic and a spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, Amir Khusrow was not only a notable poet but also a prolific and seminal musician. He wrote poetry primarily in Persian, but also in Hindavi.

He is regarded as the "father of qawwali" (the devotional music of the Indian Sufis). He is also credited with enriching Hindustani classical music by introducing Persian and Arabic elements in it, and was the originator of the khayal and tarana styles of music. The invention of the tabla is also traditionally attributed to Amir Khusrow. Amir Khusrow used only 11 metrical schemes with 35 distinct divisions. He has written Ghazal, Masnavi, Qata, Rubai, Do-Beti and Tarkibhand.

A musician and a scholar, Amir Khusrow was as prolific in tender lyrics as in highly involved prose and could easily emulate all styles of Persian poetry which had developed in medieval Persia, from Khaqani's forceful qasidas to Nezami's khamsa. His contribution to the development of the ghazal, hitherto little used in India, is particularly significant.

Early Life and Background

Yaminuddin Abul Hasan Ameer Khusro was born in Patiali near Etah in northern India. His father, Amir Sayf ud-Din Mahmud, as a Turkic Officer and a member of the Lajin (Lachin) tribe of Transoxania, themselves belonging to the Kara-Khitais. His mother hailed from Delhi. Born of a Turkish Lajin (Lachin) later Saifuddin Shamsi, Amir Khusro eclipsed all his predecessors. His interests were kaleidoscopic and his genius versatile. But he enjoyed fame in the field of Persian poetry, in which his position is next to Saadi and can favorably be compared with Hafiz in lyrics.

The road to the well is much too difficult,
How to get my pot filled?
When I went to fill the water,
In the furore, I broke my pot.
Khusro has given his whole life to you, O Nizam.
Would you please take care of my veil (of self respect),
The road to the well is much too difficult.

Later Life

Amir Khusro served seven kings and three princes from the times of Sultan Balban to Mohammad Bin Tughlaq. His passion for his birthplace Delhi was ripped to the extent that when he was posted in Patiali, he not only lamented but completed a masanwi under the title 'Shikayatnamah-e-Patiali'. Condemning Patiali and recalling the beauty and pleasure of his hometown Delhi, he compares himself with Joseph, who in separation from his home town Kan'an, feeling himself distressed, always pined for it.

"As Joseph, after having been taken away as a captive from his home town, Kan'an, used to sing the praise of his home town, so is the case with me. Though I happen to be faraway from my home town, yet I always sing of its beauty. My place was Quwat-ul-Islam (a title of Delhi) a qibla of the kings of seven climes (i.e. of the entire world). That place is Delhi, which is a twin sister of the holy paradise and true copy of Arsh (throne of God or a highest heaven) on the page of the earth."

Literary Life

Poetry was inherent in Ameer Khusro. The day he was born, his father took him to a God absorbed darwesh, who said to his father, "You have brought one who would go two steps a head of khaqani (nightingale)."

In his early childhood, Khusro had developed a putting together in verse form worse of discordant meaning. Up to the age of sixteen, whichever book of verse he happened to lay his hand on, he tried to follow its author in the art of composition.

His adolescence ushered him under the guidance of both Mufti Muizzudin Gharifi and Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, his mentor. Both of them guided him to the path of following the style of Saddi and Kamal Isfahani. Even at that young age, he used to lambaste his contemporaries, including Hasan Dehlavi in qitah (quatrains).

"And occasionally I used to lambaste my contemporary poets, with the sword of my tongue in a qitah form." Ameer Khusro was quite indifferent in politics, he never indulged himself in the intrigues of courtiers. He is considered as the pioneer figure of the Indo-Muslim music. In fact, it was he who started the process of synthesizing Turko-Persian music with Indian music. He has credited three books on music just as three diwans of poetry.

"My verses have so far been collected in three diwans, would you believe, that if there were a system of notation for registering musical compositions, my performance in the field of music too, would have been collected in three registers" He invented number of ragas and raginis which include such novelties as Qaul, Qulbanah, Taranah. He also composed verses in Persian and Hindwi.

Royal Poet

On the one hand Sultan Aalauddin, for the sake of righteousness and expediency of empire, stamped out all kinds of intoxicants, the prohibited things, the wherewithals of disobedience, debauchery and wickedness with the use of chastisement and on the other side Ameer Khusro opened wide the gate of discipleship and accepted all kinds of men as his murids, be they high or low, wealthy or impecunious, noble or faqir, learned or ignorant, high born or low born, urbane or rustic, soldier or warrior.

They all abstained from improper acts and if anyone would commit a sin, he would come and confess his guilt before Khusro and would indeed renew his discipleship. Men and women, young and old, merchants and ordinary men, slaves and servants and even young children began offering prayers regularly including the late morning prayers. Even the royal ameers, the armed acquirers, secretaries, clerks, sepoys and royal slaves, were particular about offering these supererogatory prayers. Owing to Khusro's barakah (blessings), most people of the area including the high and low and irrespective of cast and creed became involved in prayers, tasawwuf

(mysticism) and tark (renunciation) and turned to piety. During the last few years of Sultan Alauddin's reign no person would talk of liquor, of beloveds, of debauchery and gambling, of obscenities and indecent life and no one would commit usury or usurp others' rights.

Out of the teachings of Khusro, the shop people gave up lying and cheating and underweighing. Scholars visiting Khusro would talk of books on tasawwuf such as Fawaid-ul-Fuwad, Qut-ul-Qulub, Ihya-ul-Uloom, Kashif-ul-Mahjub, Awarif and Malfuzat of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia. People visited the bookshops in search of the books on suluk (deportment and self-control). Owing to the increased demand among the Sufis for lota (water vessel used specially for ritual cleansing) and tasht (basin for washing hands), the prices of these articles had slightly gone up showing that most people bent towards spiritual Sufi lifestyle.

Ameer Khusro served as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity in his time. His Hindu or Hindwi poetry for which he has been so popular among the school-going children as well as elderly generation. In his introduction to Ghurra-ul-Kamal, Khusro writes, "A few poems that I have composed in Hindwi, I have made a gift of them to my friends. I am a Hindustani Turk. I compose verses in Hindwi with the fluency of running water."

Parrot of India

It was he, who himself called Tuti-e-Hind' (parrot of India). 'To speak the truth, I am an Indian Parrot. If you want to listen from me some subtle verses, ask me then to recite some of my Hindwi poems." He himself did not collect and preserve his Hindwi poems but made a gift of them to his friends. His poem, Kaliq Bari is a lexicon composed of synonymous words, from four languages, Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hindwi.

Religious Life

Ameer Khusro was a devout Muslim. He was a friend and disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia. He was a profound expounder of ethics and strict observant of Sharia. Sharia acquires meaning when it maintains a close relation with reality partaking the essence of reality-love of God. If Sharia is lacking in that or in other words if it is without ain (the alphabet meaning the essence of God-love) it becomes shar (evil). Like Shah Waliullah of the subsequent year, his attitude towards the Sufis of hypocrisy was very critical.

"Ah! what a shameful scene this band of the 'pretenders to abstinence. They wear short sleeves (pose as fakirs) but keep their hands stretched in begging. They pretend abstinence but they are always in pursuit of money. They have commercialized faqiri (begging). How can one love God at the same time? As God's unity is without any shadow of duality, he does not like dualism in the path of His love.

Ameer Khusro's spiritualism, in fact, consisted in his philosophy of love, which he shared with all the Sufis. The depth of humanism in his poetry springs from that source of 'Divine love'. He has composed as many as 99 works and four lac lyrics, which cover almost every aspect of life. He was a living legend. He was more of a qalandar (a free soul), though not less of a Sufi, Khusro's humanism transcended all barriers of cast, colour and creed. In an autocratic age, when the king's wilful actions were unrestricted, Khusro had the courage and the intrepidity to speak before the king, of the value of the equality of the man.

"Though my value may be, a little less, than that of yours yet, if your veins were to be cut open, our blood will come out of the same colour."

Death

Khusro not only upheld the values of equality and dignity of labour but also the principles of social justice. His love and respect for Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia reached the apogee that when he heard about his death at Lakhnawati, he immediately arrived and went to his grave, where he blackened his face

and rolled over in dust in utter grief, tearing his garments. Six months after that event, he died on Friday 29th Ziq'ad 725AH/1325. His death is not a death in the literal sense of the world for, he would always remain one of the very few unforgettable legends of literature.

Works:

Tuhfa-tus-Sighr (Offering of a Minor) his first divan, contains poems composed between the age of 16 and 19
Wastul-Hayat (The Middle of Life) his second divan, contains poems composed at the peak of his poetic career
Ghurratul-Kamaal (The Prime of Perfection) poems composed between the age of 34 and 43
Baqia-Naqia (The Rest/The Miscellany) compiled at the age of 64
Qissa Chahar Darvesh The Tale of the Four Dervishes
Nihayatul-Kamaal (The Height of Wonders) compiled probably a few weeks before his death.
Qiran-us-Sa'dain (Meeting of the Two Auspicious Stars) Mathnavi about the historic meeting of Bughra Khan and his son Kyqbad after long enmity (1289)
Miftah-ul-Futooh (Key to the Victories) in praise of the victories of Jalaluddin Firuz Khilji (1291)
Ishqia/Mathnavi Duval Rani-Khizr Khan (Romance of Duval Rani and Khizr Khan) a tragic love poem about Gujarat's princess Duval and Alauddin's son Khizr (1316)
Noh Sepehr Mathnavi. (Mathnavi of the Nine Skies) Khusrau's perceptions of India and its culture (1318)
Tarikh-i-Alai ('Times of Alai'- Alauddin Khilji)
Tughluq Nama (Book of the Tughluqs) in prose (1320)
Khamsa-e-Nizami (Khamsa-e-Khusrau) five classical romances: Hasht-Bahisht, Matlul-Anwar, Sheerin-Khusrau, Majnun-Laila and Aaina-Sikandari
Ejaaz-e-Khusrovi (The Miracles of Khusrau) an assortment of prose compiled by himself
Khazain-ul-Futooh (The Treasures of Victories) one of his more controversial books, in prose (1311-12)
Afzal-ul-Fawaid utterances of Nizamuddin Auliya
?haliq Bari a versified glossary of Persian, Arabic, and Hindawi words and phrases attributed to Amir Khusrau, but most probably written in 1622 in Gwalior by ?iya ud-Din ?husrau
Jawahar-e- Khusrovi often dubbed as the Hindawi divan of Khusrau

A News came

Tonight there came a news that you, oh beloved, would come -
Be my head sacrificed to the road along which you will come riding!
All the gazelles of the desert have put their heads on their hands
In the hope that one day you will come to hunt them....
The attraction of love won't leave you unmoved;
Should you not come to my funeral,
you'll definitely come to my grave.
My soul has come on my lips (e.g. I am on the point of expiring):
Come so that I may remain alive -
After I am no longer - for what purpose will you come?

Amir Khusro

Beholding Your Appearance

Beholding your appearance, Oh Nijaam
I offer myself in sacrifice.
Amongst all the girls, my scarf is the most soiled,
Look, the girls are laughing at me.
This spring, please dye my scarf for me,
Oh Nijaam, protect my honour.
In the name of Ganj-e Shakar (Nizamuddin Aulia's pir) ,
Protect my honour, Oh beloved Nijaam.
Qutab and Farid have come in the wedding procession,
And Khusrau is the loving bride, Oh Nijaam.
Some have to fight with the mother-in-law,
While some with sisters-in-law,
But I have you for support, Oh Nijaam

Amir Khusro

Celebrate Spring Today

Rejoice, my love, rejoice,
Its spring here, rejoice.
Bring out your lotions and toiletries,
And decorate your long hair.
Oh, you're still enjoying your sleep, wake-up.
Even your destiny has woken up,
Its spring here, rejoice.
You snobbish lady with arrogant looks,
The King Amir is here to see you;
Let your eyes meet his,
Oh my love, rejoice;
Its spring here again.

[Translated from 'Aaj Basant Manaalay']

Amir Khusro

Couplet

Oh Khusrau, the river of love runs in strange directions.
One who jumps into it drowns, and one who drowns, gets across.

1

The creaking of the chain of Majnun is the orchestra of the lovers,
To appreciate its music is quite beyond the ears of the wise.

2

If I cannot see her, at least I can think of her, and so be happy;
To light the beggar's hut no candle is better than moonlight.

3

My heart is a wanderer in love, may it ever remain so.
My life's been rendered miserable in love, may it grow more and more miserable.

4

People think they are alive because they have soul in them,
But I am alive because I have love in myself,
And I'm a martyr due to the beloved's affliction,
(for, to a lover, nothing is dearer than
the affliction brought forth by the beloved) .

5

My beloved speaks Turkish, and Turkish I do not know;
How I wish if her tongue would have been in my mouth.

6

Old age and lovemaking do not go together;
But O Khusrau, you still remain a proof against this reasoning.

7

If there is a paradise on earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this

8

You look sleepless, in whose embrace did you pass the night;
Your intoxicated eye has still the signs of tipsiness.

9

The dust of your doorstep is just the right thing to apply,
If Surmah (kohl powder) does not show its beauty in the eye!

10

How can her eyes reflect any sympathy, with my night-long wakefulness?
For she herself knows of nothing, in the night, except sleeping.

11

I have become you, and you me, I am the body, you soul;
So that no one can say hereafter, that you are someone, and me someone else.

Amir Khusro

Dear Father

Why did you part me from yourself, dear father, why?
You've given houses with two stories to my brothers,
And to me, a foreign land? Why dear father, why?
We (daughters) are just cows tied to your peg,
Will move on to where ever you drive us to, dear father.
We are just flower-buds of your garden,
And are asked for, in every household, dear father.
We are just birds from your cage,
Will fly off when its dawn again, dear father.
I've left at home, alcoves full of dolls;
And parted from my buddies too, dear father.
When my palanquin passed beneath the terrace,
My brother fainted and fell, dear father.
As I remove the curtain from the palanquin,
I see we've reached the beloved's house, dear father.
Why did you part me from yourself, dear father, why?

Amir Khusro

Dye Me In Your Hue

Dye me in your hue, my love,
You are my man, oh beloved of Almighty;
Dye me in your hue.
My scarf, and the beloved's turban,
Both need to be dyed in the hue of spring;
Whatever be the price for dyeing, ask for it,
You can have my blossoming youth in mortgage;
Dye me in your hue.
I have come and fallen at your door step,
For you to safeguard my pride, my dignity,
You are my man, Oh beloved of Almighty,
Dye me in your hue.

Amir Khusro

Ecstatic Eyes

O wondrous ecstatic eyes, o wondrous long locks,
O wondrous wine worshipper, o wondrous mischievous sweetheart.
As he draws the sword, I bow my head in prostration so as to be killed,
O wondrous is his beneficence, o wondrous my submission.
O wondrous amorous teasing, o wondrous beguiling,
O wondrous tilted cap, o wondrous tormentor.
Do not reveal the Truth; in this world blasphemy prevails, Khusrau;
O wondrous source of mystery, o wondrous knower of secrets.

Amir Khusro

Every Sect Has a Faith

Every sect has a faith, a direction (Qibla) to which they turn,
I have turned my face towards the crooked cap (of Nizamudin Aulia)
The whole world worships something or the other,
Some look for God in Mecca, while some go to Kashi (Banaras) ,
So why can't I, Oh wise people, fall into my beloved's feet?
Every sect has a faith, a Qibla.

Amir Khusro

I've Just Had an Affair

Hey, I've just had an affair with my darling,
Don't care what the neighbourhood girls say;
Just had an affair with my darling.
Oh, his beautiful face, charming like an idol,
I've just made a place in the bottom of his heart.
I, Khusrau, give my life to Nizamuddin in sacrifice,
I've just had him call me his most favourite disciple;
Don't care what the neighbourhood girls say,
Just had an affair with my darling.

Amir Khusro

Just a glance

You've taken away my looks, my identity, by just a glance.
You've taken away my looks, my identity, by just a glance.
By making me drink the wine of love-potion,
You've intoxicated me by just a glance;
My fair, delicate wrists with green bangles in them,
Have been held tightly by you with just a glance.
I give my life to you, Oh my cloth-dyer,
You've dyed me in yourself, by just a glance.
I give my whole life to you Oh, Nijam,
You've made me your bride, by just a glance.
You've taken away my looks, my identity, by just a glance.

Amir Khusro

Master

'Whoever accepts me as a master,
Ali is his master too.'

{Rest of the lines are Tarana bols, which are meaningless and are chants of the sufi saints}

Amir Khusro

My Youth

My youth is budding, is full of passion;
How can I spend this time without my beloved?
Would someone please coax Nizamuddin Aulia,
The more I appease him, the more annoyed he gets;
My youth is budding.....
Want to break these bangles against the cot,
And throw up my blouse into fire,
The empty bed scares me,
The fire of separation keeps burning me.
Oh, beloved. My youth is budding.

Amir Khusro

Persian Poem

I am a pagan and a worshiper of love: the creed (of Muslims) I do not need;
Every vein of mine has become taunt like a wire,
the (Brahman's) girdle I do not need.
Leave from my bedside, you ignorant physician!
The only cure for the patient of love is the sight of his beloved -
other than this no medicine does he need.
If there be no pilot in our boat, let there be none:
We have god in our midst: the sea we do not need.
The people of the world say that Khusrau worships idols.
So he does, so he does; the people he does not need,
the world he does not need.

Amir Khusro

Rains Have Come

Dear Mom, send my dad across; the rainy season has come.
Oh, dear daughter, how can I?
Your dad's too old; the rainy season has come.
Dear Mom, send my brother across; the rainy season has come.
Oh, dear daughter, how can I?
Your brother's too young; the rainy season has come.
Dear Mom, send my uncle across; the rainy season has come.
Oh, dear daughter, how can I?
Your uncle's too dandy; the rainy season has come.

Amir Khusro

The Yellow Mustard is Blooming

The yellow mustard is blooming in every field,
Mango buds are clicking open, other flowers too;
The koyal chirps from branch to branch,
And the maiden tries her make-up,
The gardener-girls have brought bouquets.
Colourful flowers of all kinds,
In hands everyone's bringing;
But Aashiq-rung (the lover) , who had promised to come
To Nizamuddin's house in spring,
Hasn't turned up - its been years.
The yellow mustard is blooming in every field.

Amir Khusro

Too Much Difficult

The road to the Well is too much difficult,
How to get my pot filled?
When I went to fill the water,
In the furor, I broke my pot.
Khusrau has given his whole life to you Oh, Nijam.
Would you please take care of my veil (or self esteem) ,
The road to the well is much too difficult.

Amir Khusro

What a Glow Everywhere I See

What a glow everywhere I see, Oh mother, what a glow;
I've found the beloved, yes I found him,
In my courtyard;
I have found my pir Nizamuddin Aulia.
I roamed around the entire world,
looking for an ideal beloved;
And finally this face has enchanted my heart.
The whole world has been opened for me,
Never seen a glow like this before.
Whenever I see now, he is with me,
Oh beloved, please dye me in yourself;
Dye me in the colour of the spring, beloved;
What a glow, Oh, what a glow.

Amir Khusro

What was the Place

I wonder what was the place where I was last night,
All around me were half-slaughtered victims of love, tossing about in agony.
There was a nymph-like beloved with cypress-like form and tulip-like face,
Ruthlessly playing havoc with the hearts of the lovers.
God himself was the master of ceremonies in that heavenly court,
oh Khusrau, where (the face of) the Prophet too was shedding light like a candle.

Amir Khusro